



Organizing for Family Involvement

Why go this route?

- Because family and community involvement is required under the provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and EducationYES!
- Because Title I schools have been required to co-create a compact with their parent community.
- Because parents and guardians are essential partners in the education of our students. If parents are not included in school planning and communication, they cannot be expected to understand and support the school's reform efforts.
- "The schools that have succeeded against the odds have a shared ingredient: strong involvement with parents and communities. Why? Because students whose parents are involved are more likely to succeed, and schools with parents and community collaborations create cultures of success that attract additional investment."

—Mediratta and Fruchter. *From Governance to Accountability: Building Relationships that Make Schools Work*. 2003.

You'll know you've arrived when...

- Parents are visible in the school, and their support is verifiable through increased attendance at parent-teacher conferences, open houses, school programs and as volunteers.
- Student attendance goes up and the number of tardy students decreases.
- Teachers increase and document the number of positive contacts with parents/guardians.
- Parents increase the number of positive contacts with teachers and the office (calls to check on student progress, report illness, request assistance, report positive incidents).

Construction Zone

There must be a commitment to communicating with parents. You can't go half-way. Once you start, there is no turning back. We recommend it, though it's sometimes challenging.

Parent involvement must go beyond fund-raising and potlucks. This packet suggests ways to offer support and instruction to parents so they understand what the school and their children need.

We cannot simply continue to tell them (or worse, critique them). We need to show parents from all social and economic backgrounds how to help their children with literacy, learning skills and appropriate school behavior.

It's about TIME

- Set aside time to meet regular deadlines for scheduled newsletter issues.
- Include time for office staff, instructional aides or volunteers to copy, collate and countout newsletter copies.


Potential COSTS

- Costs will depend on the size of the school. The parent group might assume responsibility for financial costs or for doing the clerical work of newsletter production.



The Process

A step-by-step guide to organizing opportunities to communicate with and involve parents in their school.

NOTE: Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

1 Identify which elements of a comprehensive communication plan are already in place:

- A. Parent Handbook *SEE PROCESS 1 of 4*
- B. Ways to share the school's on-going story (newsletters, brochures, surveys, positive calls, etc.) *SEE PROCESS 2 of 4*
- C. Well-attended parent conferences *SEE PROCESS 3 of 4*
- D. A systematic volunteer system *SEE PROCESS 4 of 4*

2 Work on one element that you don't have—probably in a-b-c-d order. Choose just one at a time.

We've included four separate sub-processes in the packet, one for each of the elements listed above. Work on one at a time until you're confident it's solidly in place, making reference to the inserts and samples relevant to each step.

3 Ensure on-going maintenance of your new system by setting aside time. See MI-Map Packet 1:5 "Organizing the School Year" for a calendar system that "tickle files" tasks so you can schedule them on your weekly "to do" list.

4. Consider moving on to the next element above.



Getting more mileage from increasing family involvement

How organizing opportunities for communication with and involvement of parents benefits your school in regard to the following initiatives:

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

- NCLB requires parental involvement in the writing of reform plans, in developing a school-parent compact, in identifying how parents will be responsible to support their children's learning and in participating in decision-making about their children's education.

Education YES!

- Schools are required to report explicitly on their efforts to involve and engage parents in the educational activities of the school. Steps such as those outlined in this packet will contribute directly to that reportable activity.

MI-Plan

- Step 6, pages 17-24 of *the Parent Involvement Policy*, gives two examples of parent involvement policies for schools. In addition, two examples of parent compacts are included.



Resources

People

Specialists

Many Intermediate School Districts have a specialist working with schools on parent engagement in their service areas.

Coaches

The *Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools* website lists coaches whose training has been provided by Michigan State University and supported by the Michigan Department of Education. Some are active in parent involvement in Michigan schools. Please visit:

www.abcscoaches.org

Primary Author for this MI-Map Packet

Ron Collins
Partner Educator
Office of School Improvement

MI-Map Coordinator/Editor

Joann Neuroth
Changing Horses
neurothj@aol.com

For more information, contact

Office of School Improvement
Michigan Department of Education
517/241-4285

Associations

National Association of
Elementary School Principals
<http://www.naesp.org>

National Association of
Secondary School Principals
<http://www.nassp.org>

Association of Supervision and
Curriculum Development
<http://www.ascd.org>

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Process One (of 4)

A step-by-step guide for a **PARENT GUIDEBOOK**

NOTE: Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet

A Parent Guidebook is part of an overall four-part approach to organizing family involvement.

- 1 Discuss the need for (or revision of) a Parent Handbook** with the School Improvement Team.
- 2 Identify funds** for printing the Parent Handbook.
- 3 Meet with the parent group** to collect their suggestions for Parent Handbook topics.

School Improvement Team representatives can do this.

- 4 Survey families** to learn what information they need in a Parent Handbook.
- 5 Interview new parents as they register** to find out what they want and need to know about your school.
- 6 Ask staff to suggest material** and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) to include in the Parent Handbook.
- 7 Collect sample Parent Handbooks** from other schools and other Districts.

A School Improvement Team sub-committee can do this.

8 Summarize your research.

The SIT subcommittee summarizes what it has found into a sample Table of Contents, like the starter-version presented as INSERT for HANDBOOK Step 8. It presents its recommendation to the full School Improvement Team, which agrees on content.

9 Form an ad hoc committee to write the Parent Handbook.

INSERT for HANDBOOK Step 9 offers sample pages to adapt and customize. Include parents, SIT representatives, staff and principal on the ad hoc committee. They should:

1. Divide up work and set a timeline for drafts.
2. Determine quantity to be printed (One per family, additional copies for split families, next year's kindergarten and new students, and a few extra to replace lost/damaged originals).
3. Draft sections and meet to review each others' drafts.
4. Select pictures or clip art for sections.
5. Format each page to have both page numbers and date of publication.
6. Arrange SIT and staff review of draft Parent Handbook.
7. Solicit bids for publishing the final copy.
8. Print final copies.


- 10 Label each Handbook with a family name** and send it home to the family with the youngest or only child enrolled.
- 11 Distribute extra copies as needed** when new children register or when kindergarten families arrive in the fall.
- 12 Save the document on disk** to facilitate updating and republishing.



Process Two (of 4)

A step-by-step guide for

SHARING THE SCHOOL'S ON-GOING STORY

NOTE: Steps marked with a 

are accompanied by one or more

inserts, included in this packet.

Sharing The On-going Story is part of an overall approach to organizing family involvement.

1 Identify a group of “key communicators” to serve as your Parent Involvement Steering Committee.

Try to recruit parents who represent the different neighborhoods, ethnic/racial groups and grade levels in your school. See INSERT for STORY Step 1.

2 Assess your current practice for “family friendliness.”

Ask the Steering Committee to use the checklist in INSERT for STORY Step 2 for self-reflection.

3 Survey your parent community to determine what they need in order to actively participate in your Parent Group.

INSERT for STORY Step 3 suggests a survey you could use.

4 Plan for parental involvement.

Use INSERT for STORY Step 4 to develop one event that is relevant and inviting, based on survey results, direct contacts and steering committee judgment.

5 Publish a school newsletter regularly, with volunteer help typing, editing, copying, collating and distributing it.

INSERT A for STORY Step 5 offers tips for making the newsletter lively and effective. INSERT B for STORY Step 5 is a sample newsletter.

6 Develop and publish a brochure and classroom newsletters to advertise the many good points about your school.

INSERT A for STORY Step 6 is a process for developing good newsletters.

INSERT B encourages bragging. INSERT C is a sample brochure.

7 Emphasize first-hand communication.

This is the heart of the principal's job. (S)he must be visible and accessible at arrival and dismissal times. Say hello, get to know parents, LISTEN. Even if you can't make time for an immediate concern, show you care and take comments and concerns seriously.

8 Return calls as soon as possible. Establish a practice that the sun doesn't set on an unaddressed parent concern.

You may be able to do no more than tell them you cannot get to their concern immediately, but let them know when to expect your response.

9 Become systematic about making positive phone calls. Develop incentives for teachers who make positive contacts with parents.

Practice noting and calling when you observe polite behavior, good academic work or improvement in any area. Keep records, as a staff, and give public recognition (or a gift certificate to a local teachers' supply store) to those who build this habit.

10 Develop a data-collection system and post a graph each month of the positive written or phone contacts that staff has initiated.

INSERTS A and B for STORY Step 10 are data-collection forms.

11 Develop a brochure that coaches parents on how and when to communicate concerns to the school.


INSERT for STORY Step 11 is a sample brochure.



Process Three (of 4)

A step-by-step guide for

CHECKING THE COURSE AT CONFERENCES

NOTE: Steps marked with a 

are accompanied by one or more inserts,

included in this packet.

Parent Teacher Conferences are one part of a four-part overall approach to organizing family involvement.

- 1 Use Professional Development time** to orient teachers to the goals and procedures for conferences.
Role play exercises to help teachers, especially new teachers, to anticipate and deal positively with typical parent questions.
- 2 Arrange generous time for conferences.** Provide substitutes if added time is needed.
Many parents cannot easily get off work to attend conferences. Attempt to coordinate conferences for parents with more than one child. Prepare a separate letter explaining how to do that for families with siblings in your school.
- 3 Provide child care, refreshments, translation services and transportation, if necessary.**
Work with the Parent Group or your local high school to arrange these support services. Let parents know they're available.
- 4 Notify parents well in advance** of the conference dates and times. Repeat the notices in newsletters often.
Send home information that tells parents about the conference process, give them some questions to consider and discuss how to bring up and address concerns.
- 5 Consider involving students** in Parent-Teacher Conferences. There are many benefits to doing so, including increased parent attendance. Perhaps 2-3 teachers would pilot the idea and report their experience to the rest of the staff.
We've included one article (INSERT A for Conferences Step 5) exploring the reasons for inviting students into the conferences. Others are available at www.asia.indstate.edu/guidingallkids/studentledconferencing.htm and www.education-world.com/a_admin112.shtml
www.rialto.k12.ca.us/frisbie/coyote/interdisciplinary6.html
- 6 Collect samples of each child's work** to share at the conference.
- 7 Plan carefully what you hope to accomplish.** Teachers must decide what information to share, what problems need solving, and what information they need from the parent. **DO NOT OVERWHELM THE PARENT.** Settle on no more than two or three concerns to be discussed.
Include a copy of "Students' self-rating." See INSERT A for CONFERENCE Step 7. Use the checklist included as INSERT B for CONFERENCE Step 7 to be sure you're ready. If students are leading the conference, develop an agenda to guide all participants, as illustrated by the sample agenda in INSERT C for Step 7.
- 8 Remind parents** of the time, location and length of conference.
Include any expectations you have for the conference.
- 9 Ask parents for feedback** about how the conference worked.
INSERT for CONFERENCE Step 9 suggests one form for soliciting feedback.


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Process Four (of 4)

A step-by-step guide for

GUIDES ON THE JOURNEY: RECRUITING, TRAINING AND USING VOLUNTEERS

NOTE: Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

A volunteer program is part of an overall approach to organizing family involvement.

This section draws heavily on the work of Epstein and the National PTA .

- 1 Survey staff** to find out how they'd like to use parents' time and talents.

This can be informal at a staff meeting or through a survey such as INSERT A for VOLUNTEERS Step 1. INSERT B for VOLUNTEERS Step 1 identifies research-derived benefits to achievement, behavior and culture for schools who nurture volunteer relationships.

- 2 Sort volunteer tasks into** categories for easy browsing.

Differentiate between school-wide and classroom activities, and between those that must be done during the school day vs. those that can be completed off-site and outside of regular school hours.

- 3 Survey parents and community** to learn about their talents, experience, interest and skills.

INSERT for VOLUNTEERS Step 3 is a suggested worksheet.

- 4 Charter a Volunteer Coordinating Team** to supervise scheduling, training, evaluating, and rewarding volunteers. The principal will serve as the overall supervisor of the volunteer program and meet with the Volunteer Coordinator at least weekly at the start of the program.

- 5 Write job descriptions** for volunteers.

Take time at a staff meeting to have grade-level teams write these. Include in each a detailed description of what needs to be done, the time required, a schedule for at least a month in advance, the person to whom the volunteer is responsible, the importance of the task to the individual student, to the class and to the school, and a hope for what the volunteer could gain from the experience.

- 6 Recruit and assign volunteers.** Continue recruitment throughout the year as new families move in and situations change.

Give each volunteer an assignment notification with the "Key Hints" for volunteers on the back. See INSERT for VOLUNTEERS Step 6 for a sample.

- 7 Train and welcome volunteers.**

Build an orientation and training program that sets a welcoming tone and a supportive environment. Include a map and tour of the building and introductions to key staff. Hand out "guidelines" of your expectations of volunteers (INSERT for VOLUNTEERS Step 7 is a sample). Establish a location for volunteer materials, a welcoming volunteer "lounge" and a schedule for assignments and meetings.

- 8 Publish a "Volunteer Directory."** Work with the Volunteer Coordinator to produce and distribute the directory to parent leaders, teachers and office staff.

- 9 Set up a system for knowing who is in the building.**

Establish a badge or button system for volunteers when in the building. Have a set location for the Volunteer Sign-in/out form. (See INSERT for VOLUNTEERS, Step 9) Explain why this is important.

Ask volunteers and staff for feedback about the program periodically.

